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MR. HIGGINSON'S
ADDRESS
TO THE VOTERS
OF THE
THIRD CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT
OF MASSACHUSETTS.

LOWELL:

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ADDRESS TO THE VOTERS OF THE THIRD DISTRICT.

Placed before you, by no desire of my own, as the candidate for Congress of the Free Soil party of this District, I feel it to be no more than justice to that party, to you and to myself, that I should set before you, as plainly as I may, the grounds of my and their position. It is of little importance whether votes be gained or lost by telling the truth, but it is of great importance that they should be neither gained nor lost by a misunderstanding of the truth. And it is therefore that, being unable personally to set forth our position, so generally as I could wish, among the voters of the district, I adopt this method of defining it.

There can hardly be a greater mistake than to suppose that either the Liberty Party, or that larger movement into which it was two years since expanded, had a merely temporary ground of existence. Temporary circumstances were its occasion only, not its cause. Its cause lay in the conviction of thousands of minds in Massachusetts and elsewhere, not only of the intrinsic sin and wrong of Slavery, but in the intrinsic peril to Freedom from the Slave Power of this nation. They saw that a small body of slaveholders had by union and by years of unwearied effort secured such controlling influence as to make all other political interests subservient to that of their unrighteous system, "whose preservation, propagation and perpetuation became (in the words of John Quincy Adams) the vital and animating spirit of our government." They saw that the two great parties of the North were both ready to compromise this question, while the South made but one party, and controlled them both. Believing that the only safety lay in an imitation of this last policy, and in opposing a permanent obstacle to a permanent danger, they organized a party for that purpose.

The immediate occasion of the agitation of two years since, was only a new form of the old danger. The previous aggressions of the Slave Power had seemed enough, but they were not enough. The Missouri Compromise, the Florida War, the Annexation of Texas, the Mexican War, the imprisonment of Northern freemen in Southern ports, had followed in rapid succession. But this was not enough. New and free territory had been acquired. To prohibit the extension of slavery into such territory, had been the settled national policy from the days of Jefferson to our own days. The Slave Power demanded the abandonment of this policy, and the express toleration of slavery. The danger was imminent. Both the Whig and the Democratic parties, after many professions, finally refused to make opposition to this demand a party principle. The Free Soil party was roused into action by this treachery. It began a course of *political* agitation, designed to induce Congress to settle this question on the side of freedom; and a course of *moral* agitation, to induce the inhabitants of the new territory so to settle it themselves. The political agitation has at length been defeated, by the overpowering votes of Northern Whigs and Democrats; and if slavery does not extend itself into the new territories, it will be, by

the confession of slaveholders,* because the moral agitation did not fail.

The subject of slavery, almost unknown in Congress until within three years, has during this session been the one absorbing theme. That determined and united Southern minority, feeling their power glide from them, have been driven to unparalleled demands. A portion of them, utterly deserting the original platform of non-intervention, have demanded "the whole or none," and refused even to allow the citizens of California to decide for themselves, should that decision be in favor of freedom. They were wise, perhaps, for their own ends in making such demands. Where so much was unblushingly demanded, the timidity of the North thought it necessary to concede something, though that something might be far too much. There are always compromisers. There are always men, said Lafayette, who if any one claims that two and two make six, will find it absolutely necessary to go half way, and admit that two and two make five.

A series of "compromise measures" were introduced, founded upon somewhat such principles. A compromise whose terms were originally dictated by a committee of the Senate composed, one half of slaveholders, one half of Northern men professedly and notoriously distinguished for their acquiescence in the views of slaveholders; and including but one man in any degree representing the anti-slavery sentiment of the North! A compromise only resembling in its practical results that between the two gamblers, who play at cards avowedly against their dupe and the third who kindly volunteers to officiate as his partner.

The terms of the compromise were such as might have been expected. Of the six measures proposed, four were repugnant to freedom, to justice, and to the North, (viz: the toleration of slavery in New Mexico and Utah, the partition of New Mexico and the Fugitive Slave Bill); and of the two others, the one (the admission of California) was a tardy act of the plainest justice, and the other (the abolition of the slave trade in Washington) was expressly urged on the ground that it would do slavery no harm. Such was the "compromise"; such have been all our compromises with slavery.

This was the compromise; these were the "peace measures," for the honor of which the leaders of the Whig and Democratic parties are competing; and against which no large portion of either party has yet entered a hearty protest. If so it is, let it be so. If these parties boast the honor, let the question rest on this ground. We join issue here. We pronounce this honor a shame. Let them support it. Let us condemn it. On which side are the people of Mas-

*"California, now about to be admitted into the Union, would have been settled by slave-owners—by Southern men—had there not been such a general agitation at the North upon this slavery question, but they had been prevented from moving there from this cause, and therefore California was populated mostly by Northern men."—*Speech of Mr. Clingman of N.C.*

sachusetts? On which side are you, people of this District?

Let us review these compromises.

I. THE WILMOT PROVISIO SURRENDERED. During the last Congressional election, the ground of the express prohibition of slavery was assumed almost universally by New England Whigs, and in some cases by Democrats. In this district it was adopted by the former with no dissent, and the contest waged on that ground. The Free Soil party were always met with the declaration, not that their movement was objectionable, but that it was superfluous. This was strongly stated by Mr. Choate in a speech in Salem. "Have not all our Massachusetts Whigs," said he, "taken fearlessly their stand upon this ground? Do you suppose that Daniel Webster himself could be returned, if there was the least doubt of his position on this question? On all other points we are identified with our brethren of the South—on this point we propose simply to vote them down."

After these solemn assurances, what result followed? The Free Soil party of two years since were denounced as base libellers whenever they dared to hint at that which our eyes have now seen come true. On September 4, 1850, a bill was passed, expressly conceding to the new territories the right to establish slavery, should they wish,—and on that bill the names of three Massachusetts Whigs (Messrs. Eliot, Grinnell and Duncan) were recorded in the affirmative.

The Buffalo Platform, all of which had been claimed as Massachusetts Whig doctrine was forgotten. "Under no circumstances," said Mr. Webster, on Aug. 12th, 1848, "shall I consent to any further increase of Slave Representation in the House of Representatives." But this Congress has now solemnly pledged itself to admit New Mexico, "with or without slavery as the inhabitants thereof may decree."

It may be said that this pledge does not bind the next Congress. Doubtless it does not. That it does not bind the Whig party. Perhaps it does not. Massachusetts, at least, is pledged to disregard it.* But it does bind those Whigs who voted for it. It binds three Massachusetts Whigs.

It may be said that this is only a formal pledge and risks nothing. But the history of nations is full of unexpected occurrences, and it is a small satisfaction, after a priceless thing is lost forever, to know that the loss appeared improbable till it happened. Massachusetts resolved in 1849 to leave nothing in this case to "chance or uncertainty." So should it be. Even after the ordinance of 1787, so late as 1803, there was an effort made by the inhabitants of Indiana to obtain its suspension and introduce slavery. There is strong reason to believe

that slaves are held now in New Mexico and Utah and a recent decision in California set aside the Mexican law, which alone protects these territories. "I would not vote for the Compromise bill," said Senator Foote frankly, "were I not satisfied that slavery can and will be extended into New Mexico, under its provisions."

But, danger or no danger, the principle of "No more Slave States" is abandoned by those who voted for this bill, and when Cuba shall come (as who knows how soon she may) asking admission for her 325,000 slaves, to increase by one-tenth our national slavery and slave representation in Congress, it is not these Massachusetts Representatives who can consistently object. The propagandists of slavery will point at that past legislation by which the possibility of more slave States was recognized, and none can answer but those who can reply, "Then canst not say, I did it?"

On the poor evasion that this bill made a part of the Texas Bill, I need not dwell, even if that fact lent it more attractiveness. For those same three Massachusetts Whigs voted to put it into the Texas Bill,* in direct opposition to the President's plan. Yet to that policy one, at least, of these members had fully pledged himself; and that policy (of non-action) unsafe as it seemed, compared with the Massachusetts doctrine of prohibition, was a safe precedent in comparison with that doctrine of express toleration which has been conceded now.

II. THE CONCESSION TO TEXAS. It is so generally admitted in Massachusetts that the dispute between Texas and Mexico has not been regarded as a geographical question, that it is hardly, perhaps, desirable to examine it as such. The Spanish province of Texas became the Mexican State of Texas and that the U. S. State of Texas. But the boundary claimed by her in 1850 was not the boundary claimed for her at her annexation, nor at the time of the war. Was it to be conceded simply because she asked for it? She might have demanded of the Pacific. The only dignified or just method of procedure was that indicated by Gen. Taylor, that Congress should examine the title and if Texas had a title, concede it and pay for territory taken. Was this done? It is not pretended. There was avowedly a compromise, but what compromise?

Let the North answer in the words of Thaddeus Stevens:

"Fifty thousand miles of territory now free, are given to Texas to be made Slave territory, and we give ten millions of dollars to pay her for taking it."

Let the South answer in the words of Senator Clemens of Ala.: "If Texas accepts the offer made to her, instead of making a part of Texas free soil, we have made the whole of New Mexico slave soil. We get clear of the Mexican Law abolishing slavery, which is said to prevail in New Mexico, and extend the laws of Texas over the country. The inhabit-

* Legislative Resolution in 1845.—"That no territory hereafter applying to be admitted to the Union, as a State, should be admitted without a condition that domestic slavery should be utterly extinguished within its borders; and Massachusetts denies the validity of any compromise whatever, that may have been or that may hereafter be entered into by persons in the government of the Union, intended to preclude the future application of such a condition by the people acting through their representatives in the Congress of the United States."

* Two of these, however, (Messrs. Grinnell and Duncan) had previously voted against the amendment, and the latter also against the Texas Bill on its first reading. I have seen no explanation of the change. The latter gentleman also voted against the Utah bill, which seemed no more exceptionable than this. Indeed the Whig State Address passes over the danger to Utah as too slight for discussion, and dwells only on that to New Mexico.

ants of New Mexico nearly all reside on the east bank of the Rio Grande, which if it be a part of Texas, is slave soil, and will come in as a slave State—the number of inhabitants west of the Rio Grande being too inconsiderable to have any influence in determining the character of the law.”

Fifty thousand square miles, over which the beneficent free laws of semi-barbarous Mexico had hitherto extended are at one instant subjected to that terrible rule of Slavery which the North had so often pledged itself to tolerate no inch farther; nor is this enough, but ten millions of dollars are paid with it. Here are the simple facts. Truly this young State of Texas, passing from all her battles to the ways of peace, may well quote the noted words of an European soldier-statesman, that “there is more money to be made by one stroke of the pen than by the whole art of war.”

And yet it was not diplomatic skill alone that won this immense surrender. What else? It is not for me to impeach the motives of any individual. But it will stand out forever recorded on the history of this nation, that we who had pledged ourselves long since “millions for defence, not one cent for tribute,” gave at once tribute money and tribute territory under the pressure of THREATS and BRIBES.

Threats; for Texas, bankrupt, unable even to defend herself from the Indians, begging for regiments from Congress for that purpose, dared to threaten.

Bribes; for, in words attributed to Gen. Taylor, “Texas bonds were more dangerous than Texas bayonets,” and the profits on those millions of scrip were a temptation that could not easily want victims, while human nature remains as it is.

It is not the ten millions of money lavished by this bill which form its chief reproach, though they are a serious addition, even to a war-debt of seventy. Had the money been spent on a Pacific Railroad, it might have been justified. Had it been thrown into the sea, it might have been pardoned. But ten millions, spent to buy more slavery; nay, ten millions spent as a direct premium on undisguised rebellion, is something, compared with which the Mexican war, even as described by its worst opponents, was a piece of consummate statesmanship.

When Rob Roy held in subjection the Scottish glens and mountains, and levied contributions from day to day, by threats of summary punishment, I never heard that he received “black mail,” and swept off all the booty *also!*

Yet the wrong and danger were fearlessly exposed in Congress. Said Mr. Sackett of New York: “We have duties to perform; not only to the quiet of the present hour, but to that national honor and integrity that are the only guarantee of peace hereafter. The harmony that is secured at the expense of right and justice is a peace more dangerous than a thousand threats of Texas. Pursue the course marked out by this bill, and what is government worth? It is but the prey of every band of malcontents; the subject of every plot; the object of plunder to every rebel league. Under such a system no man is safe. What is government to-day is chaos to-morrow. This bill, sir, under the circumstances in which it appears, is little else than an open bid for treason in all time to come.”

Yet the votes of the Free States—nay, of New England—nay, almost of Massachusetts—turned the scale of this disgrace; and, though the Northern Whig party, by its majority, seemed on the right side, yet the Whig party of this District, by its delegate, was on the wrong.

III. THE FUGITIVE SLAVE LAW. I do not propose to go at any length into the discussion of this infamous law.* The condemnation of it, throughout the Free States, has been too general for that. I am unwilling to assume that you need any stimulus to feel outraged by a law which denies to the Free States the right to protect their own citizens in their own homes, strikes down Trial by Jury, refuses the ordinary facilities of defence to those accused, and bribes judges to render a partial verdict. And yet it must not be forgotten that this measure was included in the “compromise”—part and parcel of these “peace measures” which the leading journals and orators of both parties are vaunting now. I will not here dwell on the details of the bill till it has been more openly defended in this community; but some things must be said.

As citizens and legislators we are called on by the Constitution to permit the re-capture of fugitive slaves. But the clause in the Constitution is one confessedly now bearing much more hardly on the Free States than was designed by those who passed it, since it is well known they expected the speedy extinction of Slavery. It bears against freedom, against justice and against the general spirit of the Constitution. We are therefore justified in construing it by its letter only; and rendering it very strictly on the side of freedom.—Shylock may have his pound of flesh, but “let not a drop of blood follow,” since it was not “so nominated in the bond.” If it be possible to have more securities against danger than in ordinary legislation, if any combination of legal provisions can give the defendant additional safeguards then the whole voice of the nineteenth century demands that they be concentrated here. But what says the new law? Instead of increasing them, it *sweeps them all away*; and without a word of constitutional authority gives to slave property a security demanded for no other property, and makes the love of liberty a crime penal beyond all other crimes.

Our duty as citizens and legislators is therefore plain. First: to provide by State legislation for the defence, as far as possible, of all persons arrested under this law. Second: to agitate for its repeal, and the enactment by Congress or by the States, of a substitute as stringent for freedom as this for slavery. Third: to agitate for the amendment of the Constitution on this point, as demanded by the State Resolves in 1843.

This is our duty as *citizens*. But after all is said and done, what is our duty as *men* as to this or any law, even a Constitutional one, requiring us to assist or tolerate the enslavement of man by man? To *DISOBEY* IT, when needful, and show our good citizenship by taking the legal penalties!

There is an amount of moral wrong which no law can make right. The most valuable citizen is he who obeys the laws when his conscience is not

* I have however done this in a series of articles in the Newburyport Union.

outraged,—and when it is outraged, disobeys and takes the penalty. To bow the knee to Baal, to cast incense on a heathen altar;—men “of whom the world was not worthy” have died sooner than submit to these things; and yet these are but abstract and unimportant offences compared with the enslavement of a human being. Shall all our sympathies be wasted on the slaves of Turkey and Algiers, the outlaws of Hungary and Poland, and pass over these innocent outlaws of our own day and land? Shall we unlike Moses “betray him that wandereth,” and “return again the servant unto his master to bondage,”—unlike Jesus, do as we would *not* that others should do unto us? Nay shall wild Indian and Arab tribes, whom no bribe or penalty would allure to the surrender of a guest—shall these taunt us and proclaim that their barbarism is honor and love when compared to ours?

For myself, I cannot bear this. Born and bred in the free air of Massachusetts, in her Middlesex and Essex counties, I cannot measure the right to freedom by geographical or physical lines. I cannot sacrifice to any statute (least of all to an unconstitutional one) the duty of aiding the oppressed. All slavery is tyranny, and for me, resistance to tyrants is still obedience to God. The duty is so plain that it hides from view the thought of consequences. I cannot tell what may happen; but I can tell what is right. I do not wish to be a rebel, and where I am myself concerned will submit to the law's penalties. But if Massachusetts is not free, I know at least of one house that shall be. There is one door, which, if I can make it so, shall be a door of hope to the oppressed and to the oppressor, of hopelessness. And when I close that door against a hunted and guiltless man, or open it to his pursuers, then may the door of God's infinite mercy be closed forever against me.

I rejoice to say that but one Massachusetts Representative darkened forever an honored name within the shadow of this wicked law.* Yet which of the two great parties can disclaim it? It was only the crowning atrocity of a series of measures now claimed as an honor by both. A majority of Northern Democrats voted for it. Even the Whig party through its most influential organs supports it. A Whig Secretary of State breathed into it the life which has sustained it. Twenty Northern Whigs absented themselves when it passed.—A Whig President approved it and has yet to meet the first reproach from his own party for so doing. Is it not then accepted as their act? They did not, it is true, write beneath it, “Approved, Millard Fillmore”; but they do write “Millard Fillmore is approved”; and it is the same thing.

And now what plea of excuse can be offered for this series of evil things? None is offered, none pretended, save one only—Fear, abject Fear. Because this government was not trusted, because this Union, after its years of life and strength, had commanded no confidence, we have proclaimed to the world its weaknesses, yielded to foes of our

own household, and made concessions to a few States and a few Slaveholders, which would have stained our flag forever if made to the most powerful nation on earth.

Why not speak the truth plainly and say—the Free States have been openly **BULLIED** into consenting, not only to injustice, but worse, to Sin!

The Slaveholders of the South are about three hundred thousand, arrogant, threatening, and yet with a foe at home which the aid of the general government has to be constantly pledged to keep under. The free colored population of the Union alone are about as numerous. And yet at the bidding of those Slaveholders a series of demands is granted, by which the whole safety of these free colored men is swept away, as one triding item amid the general wreck. And these are called “Peace measures.”

Peace? it is well, but is there not a disgraceful Peace when peace is bought and right is bartered? When the Gauls offered to vacate conquered Rome, on payment of 1000 pounds of gold, they used false weights in weighing it, and when the Romans complained, the general Brennus only threw his sword into the scale and cried “Wo to the vanquished.” I believe that Peace was seldom boasted of at Rome, but we think differently of these things, and boast of ours.

“The terms *were* severe—great concessions *were* made—it *did* come hard to our consciences—but it was *necessary* to *pacify* the South!” O spirits of Adams and Warren, of earlier Puritan heroes, where had this nation been had you thus made danger paramount to duty! Or had your brave soul, O Andrew Jackson, met the threats of South Carolina with gold instead of iron!

The simple truth is, that the strength of the Union has not been proved; those who distrusted it anticipated the trial by compromising. We have quailed before a *supposed* danger. Next time (for the South will never want threats till the North learns manliness) we shall distrust more, and compromise earlier. Last year, one Southern Caucus re-considered Gott's resolution and passed the Pacheco indemnity bill. This year, two Southern Conventions created Northern votes enough (yes, and Whig votes) to defeat the Wilmot Proviso, annex a new Texas, and abolish Trial by Jury. What is the next victory to be? How long will it take, before we destroy the Union past hope by making it a mere instrument of Slavery and not worth preserving?

And what, after all, was the real danger? The leading Southern statesmen, Clay, Benton, Berrien, were Unionists. The leading Southern presses were so.* When otherwise, it was mostly for obvious electioneering purposes. Every demonstration failed. The Nashville Convention failed.† The Macon Convention failed. *The Texan legislature, upon which everything turned, rejected the war-*

* The National Intelligencer, during February last, contained long series of extracts from influential newspapers in nearly every Slaveholding State, radiating all sympathy with disunionists, and showing the groundlessness of the panic.

† The whole number of votes thrown for delegates to the Nashville Convention, in the ultra-Slaveholding State of Georgia, was 4,000; the entire vote of the State being about 90,000.

* The Representative from this District, however, expressed in a printed speech the opinion that the South were entitled to something beyond the act of 1793. Yet that act denied the Trial by Jury equally with this, and has seemed to most Massachusetts men only tolerable, because practically almost useless.

bill and adjourned, without waiting to hear the action of Congress!

But had all this been otherwise, what excuse?—O that there had been more in Congress of the manly spirit of Senator Ewing, of Ohio. "It does not affect my mind at all," said he, "to allude to supposed terrible consequences that are to follow from a defeat of this Texas bill. Whatever is right and just I am willing to enact, and would hasten to enact, even in the face of threats. When one nation begins to pay another for aggressions, she invites every body else to aggress. I will do what is just and right, but I will not go one inch farther, for being told that civil war is the alternative, no matter where, no matter by whom!"

I have reviewed thus at length, the events of the past year, because they are of the very greatest importance. They are such that in their presence the Free Soil party of this district dares not relax its independent organization. It dares not yet trust the cause of freedom in the hands of those who have touched but to betray it. The strength of the Slave Power has proved itself to be unbroken, and what new reason have we to rely upon either party to oppose it? If we have just failed, that failure is the strongest stimulus to new effort. "I need my brave marshals most," said Napoleon, "on the morning after a defeat." We have at most, been only defeated; the other parties have surrendered; and even if we have lost everything but honor, they have lost honor, which is worse.

Meanwhile, what important questions remain unsettled! It was recently admitted, even in the Whig State Convention, that the Territorial question was not yet absolutely beyond a doubt, and that "the Wilmot" may still be necessary. It is possible that the current may change in New Mexico and Utah, and that these may yet seek admission as slave-holding States. It is improbable, certainly, but not more so than the annexation of Texas once seemed. Who then shall assert the former doctrines of Mr. Webster and the Massachusetts Whigs, except the Free Soil party? Who shall resist the annexation of slave-holding Cuba? Who repeal the Fugitive Slave Bill? Who amend the Constitution on that point, as demanded by Massachusetts seven years ago? Who but the Free Soil party? True, the Northern whigs opposed the Fugitive Slave Bill. But so they once sustained the Wilmot Proviso, yet more unanimously, and now that is dead by Whig votes, and this district aided the death. Who shall abolish slavery in the District of Columbia? Not those who first voted it and then rescinded the vote under pressure of a Southern caucus.—Why, it is thought a great deed if a Massachusetts Senator dares stand up in the Senate and vindicate the rights of Northern seamen!

The Free Soil party is retrospective, only as all parties claim to be, by exposing abuses and demanding their reform; no farther. It has plenty of prospective work before it. It has learned the lesson thoroughly, that so long as slavery exists it will aggress; and that only a special organization can be relied upon to oppose it to the end. We cannot predict what new aggressions are coming; but neither could we predict the old ones till they came.—The price of liberty is still eternal vigilance.

The Free Soil Party adopted at Buffalo a platform of action covering other points than anti-slavery; it avowed itself in favor of cheap postage, of internal improvements, and of a moderate protective tariff. I am not aware that it has deserted any of these positions, while holding them all secondary to the one primary object of the overthrow of that grasping, sectional power of slavery, which, (besides its peculiar aggressions) interferences with all other legislation, and offers tariff, postal reforms, and all other important measures only on condition of a previous compromise of principles more important than any of these. The first duty of a Representative is to represent Truth and Right; the second, to represent the interests of his constituents. So far as this State is concerned, it seems to me that these have all been sacrificed together; since slavery, by its intrigues with both parties, has for years created a constant fluctuation in the protective policy, than which the worst permanent system might have proved less injurious to our manufacturers.

So long as this is the case—so long as slavery is the paramount principle of the South, so long should anti-slavery be the paramount principle of the North. Till this one truly national question is settled, the agitation cannot end. We must "legislate openly and actively on the side of freedom."—For one, I can act with no other party than one pledged to such a course. It is the only truly national party, the only permanent party. I find but one organization in this district representing this principle, and I accept with a perfect conviction of duty, its nomination.

Of my personal position or desires I have little to say. For political life, as it should be, I know well how poor are my qualifications. For political life as it, alas, now is, they seem almost as little fitted. "What should I do at Rome?" said the ancient satirist. "*I have never learned to lie.*" What should I do at Washington? I have never learned to sell for office, or to silence for threats, the few simple principles of right and truth which I plainly see; I cannot compromise them; I cannot yield them to the authority of those whom the world calls great and wise; I cannot make anything else paramount to them. It is not for me to judge the consciences of legislators; I only know that my own speaks so differently that I cannot act as they do.

That any man of independence should think a seat in Congress at this time, a tempting gratification, is something which would be quite incredible, were not such a delusion so readily attributed to candidates. It is useless to complain of this; let it be so; let even the Free Soil party be so judged. And yet, so far as my experience has gone, they have little to do with offices except to lose them; little to do with money except to pay it. So long as these are the chief duties I shall cheerfully take my share; or if I can ever find another party, truer and wiser in freedom's cause, I trust I shall be ready to take any place that may be assigned to me in its ranks, without ambition and without a fear.

I remain yours for all good works,

T. W. HIGGINSON.

Oct. 23, 1850.

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